

Warhead to Forehead (Harsh Vardhan Singh)

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Singh, H. V. (2024). *Warhead to Forehead* (1st ed., Vol. 1). Crow's Legacy Publishers. 9788196944872

The book 'Warhead to Forehead' is the culmination of various essays/articles delving deep into military thought, leadership, and international relations. The author, Harsh Vardhan Singh, blends insights from a military practitioner's point of view with the backing of extensive academic dexterity. The foreword and introduction themselves provide ample credibility to the author's writings and ideas, having been written by a distinguished member of Indian Army .

Before diving into the contents of the book, the titles themselves deliver a strong message to the civilian readers, that armed forces, contrary to common belief, are not a summation of their nuclear arsenal or tank inventory but are also driven by strong minds, competent leaders, regimented culture and the time-tested traditions. The essay also counsels persons in uniform, that change begins with oneself and can always be induced both ways in the hierarchy.

The author begins by tackling a critical yet overlooked issue of security studies, which is understanding the very meaning of the term "war". The first essay establishes the Indian mindset of defining war, where the 1999 Operation Vijay played a crucial role (Singh, 2024, 11). Brigadier Singh, here, compares various schools of thought on this matter. Considering that with matters concerning China or Pakistan, the line between military and non-military domains has blurred out, the author suggests the need for a more open mentality when perceiving threats. He also highlights the nature of contemporary military campaigns , wherein there is a greater involvement of political agendas, that allow only the political leadership to accept victory or defeat. (Singh, 2024, 15-16)

With this background, the author presents a combination of his ideas and those of renowned military thinkers and political scientists such as Carl von Clausewitz and Samuel Huntington, in the next three chapters . These essays elaborate on the intricacies of military and political thinking followed by a dissection of the thought processes of leadership and hierarchy within the army.

The author then elaborates on aspects such as military/political end states and the compartmentalised thinking of leaders, while also encouraging leaders to keep up with the evolving nature of conflict as well as to attempt to reduce the friction between military and civil domains. He also brings forth numerous correlations between diverse levels of thinking and planning, such as the one between strategy, operational art and tactics, or the one between the science,

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the art and the philosophy of war. The essays also provide a framework for soldiers at different levels of the hierarchy to fitfully engage with the various levels of planning and thinking.

Additionally, the book discusses multiple philosophical and policy-related topics by including concepts presented by thinkers such as Thucydides, Clausewitz and Jomini. Although there exists significant literature on these personalities and their articulations, this book particularly stands out as Singh laboriously explains their concepts while mapping the theories in the Indian context. The author's ability to establish clarity on such complex topics from the standpoint of a practitioner as well as an academic is one of a kind, especially when he explains the need for an efficient system in the Indian government to accommodate an effective national defence doctrine.

Essays 10 to 16 conform with topics that are extensively discussed in the field of security studies and provide the readers with insights into the morality of warfare from a military personnel's perspective. A topic of debate, autonomous weapons, is presented by the author with strong a consideration of ethics, morality, and social acceptance, which he suggests are more important factors to examine apart from legal aspect. Such a bent of mind is rarely observed in practitioners of violence, as they are considered to be staunch realists. Through his work, the author subtly challenges taboos regarding the 'hyper-realist authoritarian tyrant- nature of defence personnel. To support this, the author elaborates on the importance of leaders in modern conflicts, irrespective of the evolving nature of conflict, technological advancement, and numerous domains of warfighting. While dealing with the evolving nature of wars, a term that cannot be ignored in the 21st century is "Grey Zone Warfare". H. V. Singh explains this complex concept exceptionally well in a single line:

"When Deterrence fails, wars happen, when Deterrence succeeds Grey Zone happens, when Grey Zone fails, war happens again." (Singh, 2024, 121)

Throughout the first half of the book, the author presents ample quotes (such as the above), analogies, historical references, and statistics to support his arguments. Furthermore, this allows the readers, irrespective of their background, to venture beyond the contours of the book to understand better. The latter half of the book naturally narrows down the target audience of the author. Herein, he delves into the eventuality of being a soldier/officer, in the Indian armed forces. Ideas such as patriotism, ethos, traditions, and leadership are discussed extensively, the majority of which are driven by his personal experience in the Indian Army. It is here that the general audience would disconnect with the book, but thereon, it becomes a handbook or manual for those newly commissioned into the services, whereby providing clarity to the dilemmas one may face, irrespective of their position in the hierarchy. The culminating essays can be useful to prepare future military leaders for the challenges they may come across within their command, with Brigadier Singh's way of approaching them as samples, leaving room for creativity.

Conclusively, a pertinent drawback of this book is the lack of background to majority of the topics discussed in it, forcing the readers to engage with the book at an advanced level, requiring them to either have previous knowledge on the matter or to refer an external source for the same. Additionally, the second half of the book detaches itself entirely from security studies, focusing primarily on military leadership, which may hold value only in certain specific cases. Ultimately, the book Warhead to Forehead explores various nuanced angles of security studies without providing a 'final correct answer' to most dilemmas, instead highlighting a more elaborate discussion on the same. This does not limit the thinking of the reader on such important matters, as are the perimeters set by existing literature, but allows them to have an open yet better informed mind while dealing with them.